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AUTHOR Blumentnal, Pat
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ABSTRACT

This faculty project development had three main objectives: (1) to enable faculty to observe and evaluate their own behavior in the classroom; (2) to provide each faculty member with feedback from peers in a non-evaluative setting; and (3) to allow faculty to observe other teachers in action, to learn alternative teaching styles and to discuss their impact on students. The group was composed primarily of junior faculty in psychology. Each week, one member presented a videotape made in his classroom. The group's attention was focused on both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. The approach to evaluation was informal. Principles of role modeling, feedback, and group process were utilized. All group members felt that their participation had been beneficial, and that stated objectives had been met. In follow-up interviews, participants reported that they had: (1) developed a repertoire of alternative teaching methods; (2) implemented changes in teaching behavior; (3) continued using videotape for self-evaluation; and (4) engaged in more discussion about teaching with peers, and encouraged informal classroom visitation. The Self-Study Group appears to be a valuable model for faculty development, whereby psychology teachers can utilize their own resources for improvement without additional institutional support. (Author/JLL)

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A Faculty Self-Study Group Approach to Improving Instruction Quality

Pat Blumenthal, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
California State College, San Bernardino

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The concept of faculty development has become increasingly prominent over the past decade. This new concern is, in part, a reaction to decreased faculty mobility and increased demands for faculty accountability. Many colleges have instituted programs of student evaluation and peer review to determine whether faculty are teaching well. Much less often, however, does the institution provide resources to help faculty become better teachers. Once they leave graduate school, there are few opportunities for faculty to observe other teachers in the classroom and few occasions to discuss alternative teaching styles and methods.

This lack of resources for the improvement of college teaching contrasts sharply with the situation in most schools of education. Students preparing for careers in elementary and secondary school are offered a variety of programs to help them become more effective teachers. Many of these teacher training programs utilize videotape to help the beginning teacher modify his/her behavior. Videotapes of master teachers are used in a program described by Young (1969) to provide models for imitation and discrimination training. Microteaching, a technique developed at Stanford University in 1963, uses videotape to provide the student with a sample of his/her classroom behavior (Fortune, et al., 1967). Feedback and evaluation is offered by a supervisor; the minilesson is then retaught and reevaluated. Since its inception, microteaching

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has been adapted for use in a wide variety of settings (Borg, et al., 1970). Allen and Ryan (1969) report that microteaching has been used by over 100 institutions for teacher education, by many school districts for inservice training of established teachers, and by programs such as the Peace Corps and Teacher Corps. Other programs which utilize videotape for teacher self-appraisal are described by Allen et al. (1970).

Adaptations of the microteaching model have recently been instituted at various universities to help train graduate teaching assistants. Mozer and Napell (1975) developed such a course for teaching assistants in physics at the University of California, Berkeley. Participants met weekly to discuss learning principles and to analyze videotaped recordings of their own teaching. A similar course in methods of teaching sociology was developed by Albert and Hipp for graduate students at Texas Women's University (1976). The Clinic to Improve University Teaching at the University of Massachusetts also uses videotape feedback groups to train teaching assistants (1974).

For the experienced college teacher, however, few such programs exist. Many schools do, of course, have the audio-visual equipment necessary to videotape the teacher in the classroom but an informal survey indicates that faculty rarely do this on their own. A few large universities have extensive programs for faculty development which provide videotaping and the services of a videotape feedback consultant (e.g., the Teaching Resources Center at the University of California, Davis). At most schools, however, such resources are not provided nor are funds available to train a videotape analyst.

While serving on the faculty of a small state college, the author worked with a group of colleagues in psychology who wished to become more effective teachers. Without additional resources, the group designed a self-help project in faculty development using principles of role modelling, feedback and group process.

The project had three main objectives: (1) to enable faculty to observe and evaluate their own behavior in the classroom, (2) to provide each faculty member with feedback from a group of peers in a non-evaluative setting; (3) to provide an opportunity for faculty to observe other teachers "in action", to learn alternative teaching styles and to discuss their impact on students.

The Faculty Videotape Self-Study Group was composed, primarily, of junior faculty in psychology; each week, one member presented a 20 minute videotape made in his/her classroom. Group members took notes on selected aspects of the videotaped session.

Initially, the group considered using a structured evaluation instrument to focus attention on specific variables. After some discussion, the members decided to try a more informal approach relying on their observational skills and intuition as psychologists. Such an approach proved to be quite effective for this group. Attention was focussed on issues involving both verbal and non-verbal behavior (e.g., eye contact with students, use of the body, reinforcement of responses, use of silences, level of questionning, pacing, use of concrete examples and humor).

Subsequent attempts to use this informal approach with faculty from other disciplines (e.g., mathematics and business administration) have

been less successful. The experience of the psychology group was, to some extent, serendipitous. Although the group members had quite different backgrounds (i.e., clinical, experimental and developmental), as psychologists they shared a common language with which to observe and analyze behavior. Faculty groups from other disciplines might benefit from the use of a structured teaching evaluation instrument to focus their observations.

In the Psychology Self-Study Group, discussion of specific classroom situations often led members to examine their differing assumptions about learning methods and goals in teaching. For the participants, the Self-Study Group generated a feeling of trust and support similar, in many ways, to an encounter or consciousness raising group. This "safe space" made it possible for members to disclose aspects of their teaching (on tape and in discussions) about which they were unsure or dissatisfied.

It is interesting to note that some of the same factors identified by Yalom (1975) in his research on the effectiveness of psychotherapy groups may be present in the Self-Study group. In her paper on "The Therapeutic Status of Consciousness-Raising Groups," Warren (1976) demonstrates that at least seven of Yalom's "curative factors" are found in women's c-r groups. Five of these factors, universality (similarity to others), imparting of information, altruism (group support), imitative behavior (using group members as models) and group cohesiveness (solidarity) seem also to be at work in the Self-Study group and may account for some of its effectiveness.

Group members were interviewed after the final meeting. All felt that their participation had been well worth the time and energy

invested, and that the group had met its stated objectives. In addition, they believed that the support provided by the group helped to break down the isolation they felt as teachers within the classroom. In follow-up interviews conducted six months later, participants reported that they had: (1) developed a repertoire of alternative teaching methods; (2) implemented concrete changes in their teaching behavior; (3) continued to use videotape for the purpose of self-evaluation; and (4) engaged in more discussion about teaching with their peers and encouraged informal classroom visitation.

The Self-Study Group appears to be a valuable model for faculty development whereby psychologists can effectively utilize their own resources, without additional institutional support.

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